ABSTRACT

Cognitive Approaches to the Category of Mind in Anton Chekhov's Fiction

This dissertation has been inspired by two major research observations. First, as Andrzej Ksenicz puts it, it is owing to its "constant topicality" that Anton Chekhov's prose remains open to new research methodologies. Second, the development of cognitive science has enabled the investigation of cognitive aspects also in literary texts. Arguably, this corresponds with the ideas put forward by Chekhov himself, as he endeavoured to create a literary "science about man," which included various aspects of learning about the world. Thus, the main aim of this study is to analyse the cognitive category of mind in Chekhov's fiction. Proposed are the three subcategories: 1) the meeting of two literary minds (the literary characters, the narrator and the character), 2) the single mind (the character, the narrator), and 3) the mind of the recipient/reader. All of them have been combined with the already existing categories in critical studies of Chekhov's works, that is with the issues of communication, the motif of a case, as well as with the problem of the reader. Such a framework of the research and, accordingly, the structure of this dissertation are aimed to enable identification and exploration of various cognitive phenomena in Chekhov's text worlds.

This dissertation consists of an introduction, five chapters, and concluding remarks. In the *Introduction*, the aim of the study is stated and justified, and its outline is presented.

The first chapter, titled *Literary studies and Anton Chekhov's fiction*, is a theoretical one. It discusses various perspectives from which Chekhov's fiction has been investigated, including those proposed by critics, literary researchers, as well as by the author himself. Special attention is paid to the issues which set out the path for the intended analysis (i.e. communication, the case motif, the reader). The overview of criticism includes especially those studies which utilize cognitive methodology as well as studies authored by Polish scholars.

The second chapter, titled *Cognitivism and literary studies*, offers a reflection on this research methodology and its main assumptions, as well as presenting a concise history of cognitive studies. Particular attention is drawn to the concept of "embodiment," its shape and meaning(s). Next, this chapter discusses the following notions: the directions of cognitive-literary research (cognitive poetics and cognitive narratology), the literary category of mind, and the tools employed for its analysis in this study. Last but not least, an explanation is provided regarding the "tools" used for studying the particular aspects of Chekhov's fiction.

The further three chapters are analytical. In Chapter Three, titled *Theory of mind and relationships between Chekhov's protagonists*, the cognitive aspects of the phenomena of "failed" communication in Chekhov's prose are investigated. With regard to the so-called "theory of mind," it is demonstrated that such misunderstanding can result from the characters' improper *conceptualization* of both reality and themselves. This analysis has been based on the study of such phenomena/aspects as the so-called "small man," "Pryshybei-like behaviour" "Byelikov-like behaviour", *love story*, focus of interest, the opposition "[it] seemed to be – [it] turned out to be," the unreliable narrator. The short story *Student* serves here as an example of ideal communication – the miracle of successful contact between characters.

Chapter Four, *The mind in a "case" as the reason for a failed categorisation of reality*, is devoted to the study of cognitive errors of the single literary mind. From the point of view of cognitive studies, the Chekhov's "case" can represent such phenomena as: a constant profile against a conceptual base, a frame with filled slots, the broadening of a category with the rejection of the idea of prototype, constant scenarios of actions. In turn, attempts made by Chekhov's positive characters with a view to changing this mistaken thinking have been examined with regard to such cognitive mechanisms as metaphorical extensions, conceptual blending, and cognitive reframing.

The final chapter, titled *The reader's mind, or mental mechanisms of "cooperation" between the recipient and the author*, illustrates the text mechanisms which affect the implied reader's mind. Discussed here is the issue of distraction of attention which, on the one hand, exerts influence on the recipient's interpretative freedom and, on the other hand, affects the holistic dimension of Chekhov's fiction. As a result, it is the holistic view along with conceptual integration and axiological ambiguity which are the desired attitudes of the reader. In turn, Chekhov's rejection of traditional literary emotional scenarios is examined against the background of his polemics with narrative universals: the romantic and heroic tragicomedy.

The findings of this dissertation are summarized in its final part, i.e. *Conclusions.* It is claimed that Chekhov's "cognitive" focus is evidently confirmed by such factors as his polemics with the traditional (Aristotle's) categorization, his poetics of contradictory contexts, holism, as well as by his rejection of stereotypical thinking and literary schemas (universals). The author of this dissertation believes that cognitive methodology is indispensable to the "constant updating" (cf. A. Ksenicz above) of the knowledge concerning Chekhov's fiction. Accordingly, he suggests that further research in the directions delineated in this study should be continued.

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